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ABSTRACT

There are numerous benefits to be gained by the school counselor who chooses to do action-oriented research. Program evaluation and planning are facilitated through the use of measurable student outcomes obtained through action-oriented research. Collaborative research efforts are made possible by data gained through action-oriented research. Practical action-oriented research is the basis for proactive public relations for school counselors and school counseling. School counselor efficacy is enhanced by action-oriented research which documents the value, effectiveness, and necessity of school counseling programs. Action-oriented research may serve as the basis for grant applications and legislative efforts to improve and expand school counseling programs or mandate K-12 developmental school counseling. Research is a proactive professiona activity which will contribute to the accountability, advocacy, and advancement of school counseling. (ABL)

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Action-Oriented Research
Promoting School Counselor Advocacy and Accountability

Jackie M. Allen

Research and School Counseling

School counselors have not effectively utilized research. They even ask: "Why should we do research?" A study of school counselor research as perceived by American School Counselor Association leaders (Deck, Cecil, & Cobia, 1990) revealed little real interest in research, a lack of understanding of the relevance of research to the practicing school counselor, but a willingness to accept research if done by someone else. The connection between research and school counselor accountability is not apparent to many school counselors.

Many misunderstandings regarding the school counselor and research exist. These common myths seem to cause road blocks which impede the initiation of school counseling research. School counselors may believe that they do not have the knowledge and skills required to do research. School counselors fear engaging their time and efforts in research activities which they do not consider as a job priority. A general lack of support, both in funding and administrative encouragement, for school-based counseling research has persisted for many years. Rewards, both intrinsic and extrinsic, for doing school counseling research have not been apparent; therefore school counselors continue to respond: "Why do research?"

Action-Oriented Research

Research when understood as a proactive professional activity becomes imperative for the advocacy, advancement, and accountability of school counseling. Action-oriented research is appropriate for school counselors to use in the local school setting and beyond (Allen, Gallagher, & Radd, 1992). School counselor efficacy and efficiency thus may be enhanced.

Action-oriented research is very versatile. Both qualitative and quantitative assessment may be used in conducting action-oriented research studies. Survey and experimental designs may be used. Methods may include, but are not limited to, behavioral observations, needs assessments, rating scales, and student portfolios.

Action-oriented research focuses on immediate application, instead of the development of theory or general application. Results, usually applicable to the local school situation, may be published in counselor journals. Action-oriented research is appropriate for assessing student-based outcomes and evaluating the effectiveness of school counseling programs.

In action-oriented research, assessment methods and techniques may be used to determine characteristics of students, programs, or ideas. Changes in students, programs, or ideas which may result from a specific treatment, intervention, or process are also measured.

The application of action-oriented research in the local setting, the local school or school district, enables the school counselor to examine a specific counseling practice, program, or intervention. Action-oriented research studies concentrate on the here and now, the local situation, and strive to improve both the school counselor and the counseling services (Allen, Gallagher, & Radd, 1992).

Applications of action-oriented research are also found beyond the local school setting. Professional associations may use action-oriented research methods and techniques while gathering data to support credential and licensure efforts or to promote changes in school counseling legislation.

Problem-Solving Model

Assessment should be an integral part of school counseling. Assessment, using action-oriented research methods, assists school counselors to systematically solve problems. When viewed as a problem-solving model, assessment assists school counselors in the following ways (Hood and Johnson, 1991): (a) to motivate school counselors and students to examine various issues; (b) to clarify the nature of a problem, characteristics of a program, or aspects of an idea; (c) to make suggestions for alternative solutions to a problem; (d) to provide a means for comparing various alternatives to facilitate decision-making; and (e) to assess school counselors and students in the evaluation of the effectiveness of a proposed solution to: a problem, a particular program, or a specific intervention.

Initiating the Research Process

When initiating an action-oriented research project, the following decisions must be made (Hood & Johnson, 1991):

1. **Who will be doing the action-oriented research?** School counselor, teacher, intern, aide, parent, administrator, etc.
2. **What is being measured or evaluated?** What is the population/sample—a program, a group of students, an individual student, or an idea or concept? What type of

3. **Where will the assessment take place?** What is the setting—office, classroom, conference room, etc.?
4. **When will the assessment take place?** Will it be before or after a counseling intervention?
5. **Why is the research being done?** What is the purpose? What are the goals and objectives?
6. **How will the action-oriented research be conducted?** What is the length of time and the method for gathering data? What are the materials and other resources needed?

Resources

School counselors need support to undertake and complete action-oriented research projects. Support is available through **collaboration, funding,** and **technology**. Collaborative efforts with other school professionals, public and private agencies, and corporations provide school counselors with support to conduct action-oriented research. Multidisciplinary teams for special education and at-risk student identification and screening provide opportunities for local school collaborative research efforts. Counselor educators are natural partners for action-oriented research efforts (Allen, Gallagher, & Radd, 1992). Other collaborative efforts might be pursued with public and private agencies, corporations, and departments of education.

When planning to do action-oriented research, school counselors should consider adequate funding to complete the research project. Local school budgets and district funds often need to be augmented with additional funding from state and federal grants, professional association grants, or public and private contributions.

A variety of technological resources are available to assist school counselors in the research process. Computerization of data bases, record keeping, and data analysis have improved research capabilities enhancing the research process. Consultants are available to assist during any step of the research process. Nearby colleges and universities provide computerized data base searches, consultants, and a wide variety of computer hardware and software. ERIC/CAPS has a very large computer bank of counseling data and resources.

Legal and Ethical Concerns

School counselors need to consider certain legal and ethical ramifications when doing action-oriented research. Specific areas of concern include: confidentiality of assessment data; parent permission for minors; adequate orientation of parents and students; treatment for all students in experimental groups, and an awareness of culture and gender bias in test selection. School counselors may need a written agreement regarding ownership of findings when working with other institutions and agencies (Allen, Gallagher, & Radd, 1992). Legal and ethical standards for school counselors are found in the American Counseling Association *Ethical Standards* (1988) and the American School Counselor Association *Ethical Standards for School Counselors* (1984). Guidelines for the use and administration of tests are found in the Association for Assessment in Counseling *Responsibilities of Users of Standardized Tests* (Revised) (1989) and the American Psychological Association *Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education* (1988).

Conclusion

The are numerous benefits to be gained by the school counselor who chooses to do action-oriented research. Program evaluation and planning are facilitated through the use of measurable student outcomes obtained through action-oriented research. Collaborative research efforts are made possible by data gained through action-oriented research. Practical action-oriented research is the basis for proactive public relations for school counselors and school counseling. School counselor efficacy is enhanced by action-oriented research which documents the value, effectiveness, and necessity of school counseling programs. Action-oriented research may serve as the basis for grant applications and legislative efforts to improve and expand school counseling programs or mandate K–12 developmental school counseling. Research is truly a proactive professional activity which will contribute to the accountability, advocacy, and advancement of school counseling.

References and Resources

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